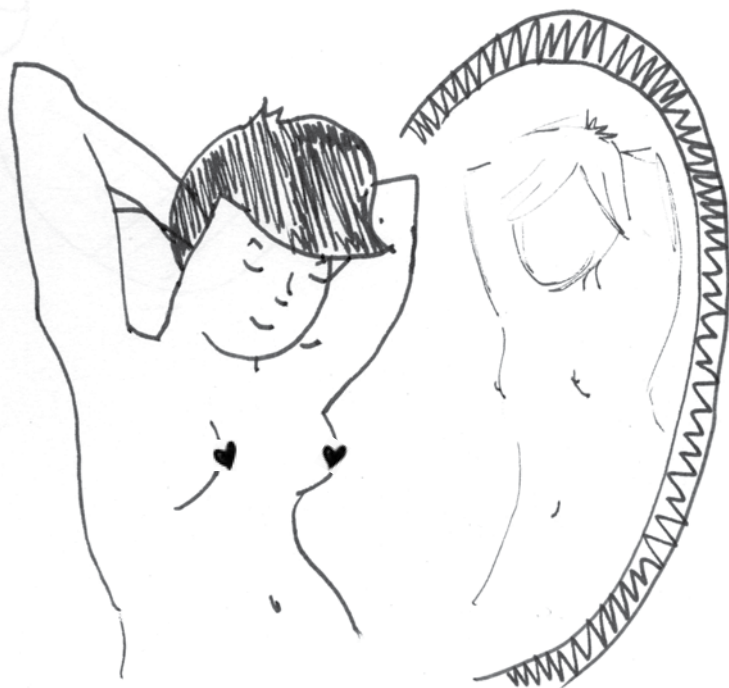




----- ≡ THE BANDIT Z/NE ≡ -----

PRESENTS

♥♥♥ RADICAL ♥♥♥ ♥♥♥ SELF LOVE ♥♥♥





PRESENTS

♥♥♥ RADICAL SELF LOVE ♥♥♥

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WHAT IS RADICAL SELF LOVE?



self-love (n.): regard for one's own well-being and happiness (chiefly considered as a desirable rather than narcissistic characteristic)

Radical self-love is doing whatever you can to keep you mentally, emotionally and physically stable, which also is defined by you. There is no wrong or right way to practice self-care. If you need to stay in bed all day in cry, do so. If you need to eat 3 cheeseburgers, go ahead. Do anything you can to get yourself outta that negative head space that you cannot progress and flourish, your existence is survival at its best and you should pat yourself on the back for that. Do what you need to do to maintain your safety, to feel safe in spaces and feel free to cut off ties with anything detrimental to your health. It's a-okay to end toxic relationships and friendships because your well-being is important and you are worth it.

Keep in mind, it does not mean that practicing acts of radical self-love comes easy or is a thing you can continue with gusto on a daily basis. You're a human with valid emotions who has ups and downs. Don't beat yourself up about it, just continue on with your day and keep doing things that make you happy. Or do things that put you at ease. Or do absolutely nothing.

It's your body and mind, find what you need to find peace. NO POLICING ALLOWED.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF!
→ TRIGGER WARNINGS ←

Trigger warnings of this zine include (but not limited to): domestic/relationship abuse, sizeism, body image, problematic substance use, mental health issues, sexual assault, rape culture, femmephobia, transphobia, gender dysphoria. Please take care of yourself and put the zine down, if you need to. Some articles may contain content discussing these issues. We've tried our best to label them with a "trigger warning" that looks like the one below.

. TRIGGER WARNING .



I have a lipstick problem.

I recently did a lipstick inventory. I have approximately 21 lipsticks in shades of every color—and even some not found in nature. That's a rough estimate because not a day goes by without me finding another tube tucked away in a coat pocket, a purse, or the glove compartment of my car.

You can divide my lipstick into two categories: "Red" and "Not Red." The latter includes colors like purple, blue, and two different tubes of black lipstick (I couldn't decide, so I got both). Then there is the "Red" category, with shades ranging from a sheer "going grocery shopping" red, the bright and shiny "Hey nice shoes, wanna fuck?" red, and my personal favorite: deep, intense "I am going to break your heart, destroy everything you love, and leave you crying on the floor in the fetal position" red.

Applying lipstick (and moisturizer and primer and foundation and eyeliner and mascara and highlighter and blush) is such an important ritual for me because my appearance is one of the few things I feel like I have any degree of control over. I may not be able to control whether or not someone harasses me, abuses me, rapes me, or just plain jerks me around, or if an ex threatens to burn my house down, or if a movie or TV show will make me so sick with anger that I curl up in a ball on my bathroom floor—but at least I can control the image of myself that I present to the rest of the world.

Which makes me feel safe. Safe is good.

My (admittedly flawed) logic is this: If you don't know what I look like without makeup on, you don't know me well enough to hurt me. This is why I always wear makeup in any social situation, and why out of the 25ish or so men I've slept with, only 3 have seen me without makeup on. Being bare-faced makes me feel more vulnerable and uncomfortable than being naked.

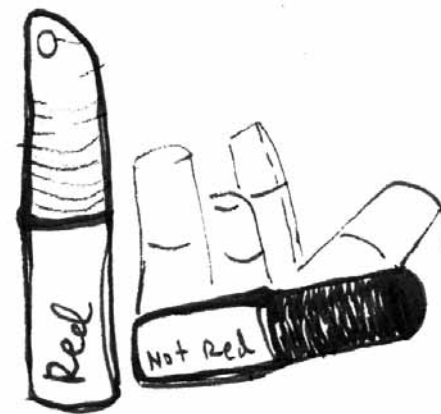
I consider wearing lipstick a radical act of self-preservation. Lipstick temporarily drives away my inner Anxiety Fairy, allowing me to be in social situations I otherwise can't handle. Even the most expensive tube of lipstick is still cheaper than a Xanax prescription, and the only side-effect is looking fabulous.

As much as I love makeup, I do not love the amount of beauty-related bullshit that I hear on a daily basis. I bristled when a professor, the former director of primetime casting at CBS, told my class, "I know your mothers all think you're beautiful, but you *have got to* wear makeup to every audition." I ugly-laugh whenever Patti Stenger, or any other so-called dating/relationship "expert" claims that men won't kiss women who wear red lipstick. That's grade-A bullshit. If anyone ever says that they "don't like girls who wear a lot of makeup" or complains that they can't kiss you because you wear lipstick, promptly punch them in the crotch and Molotov their car. **They are not worth kissing.**

The thing that pisses me off the most is when people dismiss makeup as something unimportant, shallow, and/or trivial. We have been altering our appearances by painting and smearing stuff on our faces for tens of thousands of years. This is one of the earliest rituals that we practice. IT'S NOT FUCKING TRIVIAL.

Lipstick has saved me from my more self-destructive impulses. On bad days, the kind where I drive to Meijer to buy all the X-Acto knives, it's the lipstick displays at the front of the store that make me forget about my desire to hurt myself.

My lipstick is the weapon I use in my daily fight against the demons in the world around me and inside myself. Go ahead, try to take them from me. *I really fucking dare you.*



UNTITLED

BY THUGFRESH MORENO

My need for radical, aggressive self-love is a big fuck-you to my existence. I was born, wrapped up and left for dead in a dumpster in Mexico... but out of all of that really cliché-sounding mess, I ended up here. I'm going to say this though: I'm writing like I'll never write again. I'm writing as if this is my last heaving breath. I'm bloodletting my emotions from this moment on. Please refrain from pouring salt in my wounds, for I am sitting here with my vulnerability in the palm of my hands, overflowing.

With that said, I am finally escaping the person who decided to "rescue" me when I was discarded; I am escaping my abusive home and have finally come to terms with the fact that my mom has been toxic to my mental and emotional wellbeing. I fully accept every mistake I've made, the choices I've made are my fault and I get that.

My self-love is saying fuck you.

My self-love is wearing shorts this summer.

My self-love is finally opening myself to the possibility that someone out there will fall in love with me, and I with them, and they will think of the world of me and my fat rolls and lack of random science facts.

My self-love is accepting that I am a hot mess right now.

My self-love is singing old Mexican songs at the top of my lungs, rolling my R's with gusto and pride.

My self-love is eating pizza too often.

My self-love is crying until my face is swollen and my lips are stained red because I tend to chew on them vigorously when I breach a panic attack.

My self-love is watching bad TV series while being on Tumblr and knowing I'm not alone.

My self-love is playing music from middle/high school and crying too often to old feelings and memories.

My self-love is too many Instagram selfies because I want to capture the moments I feel too fabulous to feel so sad.

My self-love is cutting my hair off and looking like a princess boi.

My self-love and self-care regime is just mine; it is ever-changing, oh-so fluid and flawed.

I want everyone to know that is okay to not be this ideal feminist or person who is self-accepting about self-love, body positivity and gender identity. If I could count the times I've felt alone, rejected and defeated.. I would probably not be here anymore and I suck at math anyway. I'm sorry for those who cannot cope. You are worth it but if you cannot do it anymore, I love you and you're valid and you can feel how you want.

It's weird because I was prepared to write an angry submission full of power, pride, self-assurance...but alas, where I am in life right now won't allow it.

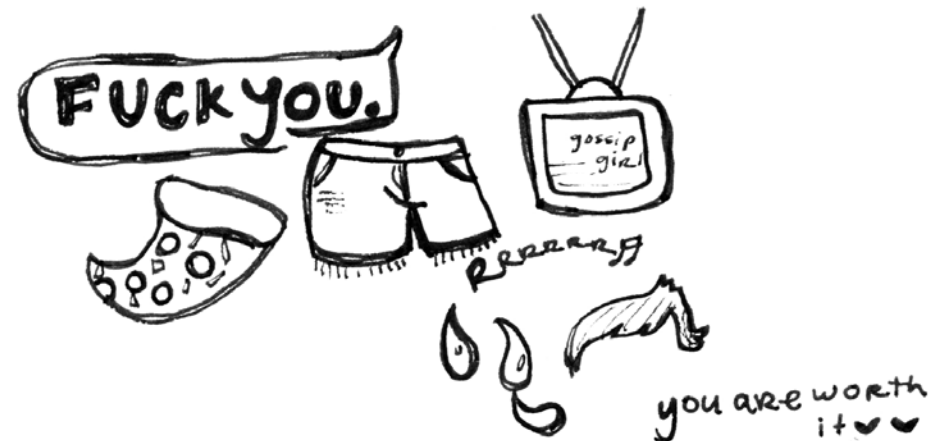
Please do what you can to survive—if you want to, that is.

Just remember you are worth it. Remember that you cannot have a wrong body, that how you cope is yours and only yours, that people are there if you need, that it's okay to ask for help.

And if possible, please remember to breathe and take it a day at a time.

With love,

ThugFresh.



LOVING MY UNCIRCUMCISED PENIS



"Caveat: white dude talking about non-super-monumental struggles and using the word 'penis' a lot."

As you might have guessed from the title, my dick's got a blanket. I don't have many recollections of my life from when I thought my penis was normal. Early on, the issue of hygiene distinguished mine from those of my peers, as my parents told me (rightly so) that I must remember to retract my foreskin and clean underneath or I might develop complications. As it happened, I did experience some mild complication and my foreskin partially fused to my glans. Though I could tell that it wasn't severe and didn't look revolting, nevertheless such a disfiguration, in my young mind, was distressing. I felt as though my penis wasn't just a non-normal penis, but that it was the wrong kind of penis.

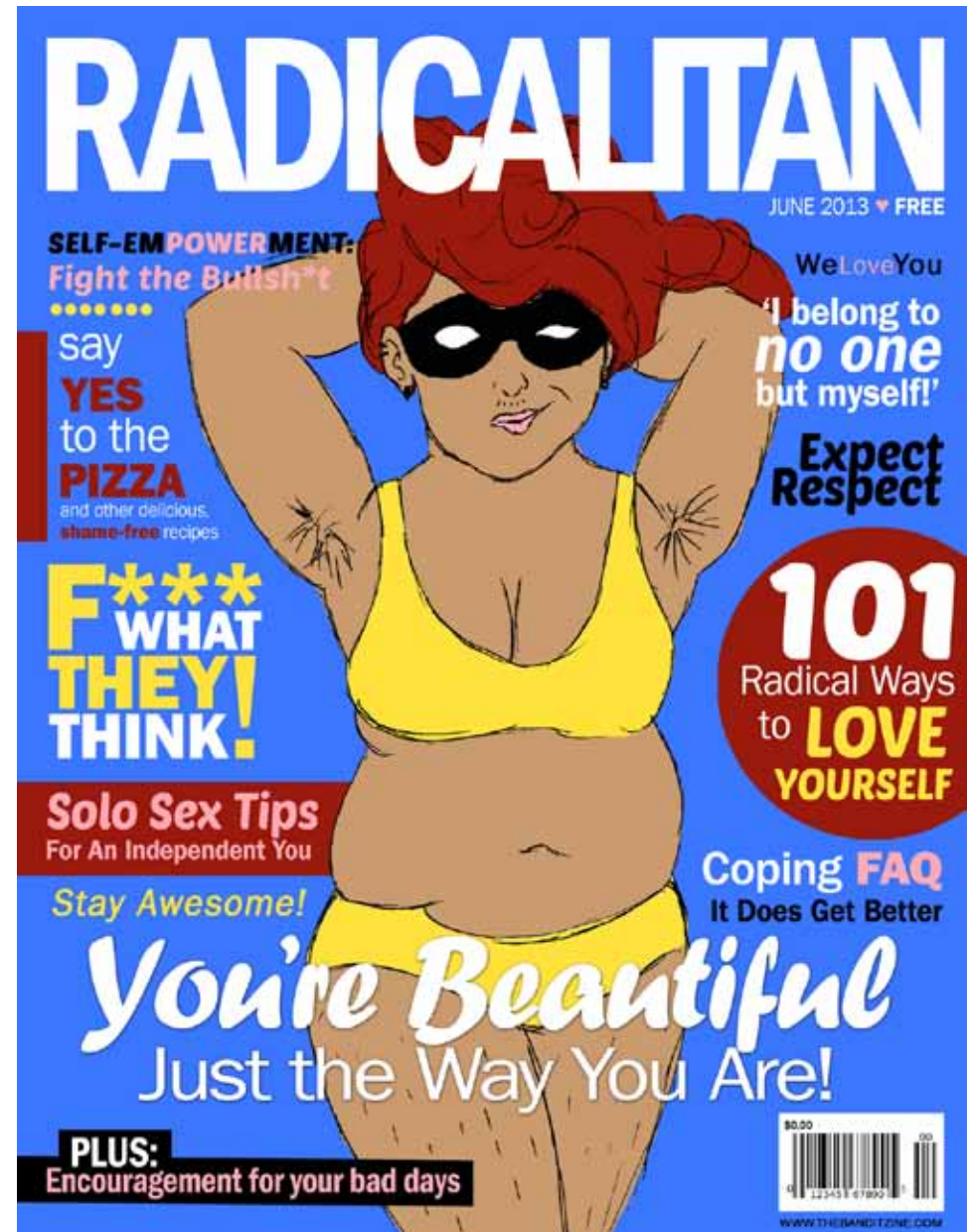
Genital-shame was a constant subtle presence in my young, formative life, cropping up occasionally to make otherwise normal childhood experiences fraught with terror and anxiety. In second grade, the boys in my class were in the habit of sharing urinals after recess. The very first time that I worked up the courage to join in, Josh (that one cool kid who showed us all up at basketball) said, his voice echoing through the bathroom, "Ewww! Asa's penis is all weird! It's like a hose!" I was crushed. I knew that mine was 'weird,' but why couldn't that just not matter? Later, I would avoid the open showers every year at summer camp until it was absolutely necessary, and even then I wore underwear, knowing that the potential ridicule from my fellow campers and awkward questions from counselors was better than being seen uncut.

Issues of sexuality eclipsed issues of genitalia when I was a teenager, though. There were a few comments about how some people really like uncircumcised dicks, and though I now realize the problematic aspects of fetishizing one type of genitalia/body

over another, those comments did help me come to terms with myself. I had briefly thought about getting circumcised, but thankfully I recognized that as an unrealistic bid for a normality that I'd already realized wasn't quite what I wanted. In particular, the first few times someone touched my penis and didn't say anything about it being weird, I started to see things differently. They might not have even realized I wasn't circumcised, as it was all under-the-clothes stuff, but still the thought had entered my head that maybe it might not matter if I had a different penis. Maybe what mattered was what we felt about each other.

I no longer treated my penis as an object of shame, but I still hadn't learned to love my body for what it was. I reassured myself that once I met that one special person, they would be fine with my anatomy—but what about everyone else? Everyone that wasn't 'that one special person' (and none of them are until you stop thinking about it that way) might still reject me, might still ridicule me the way Josh did in second grade. In college, though, I finally met a few people who were uncircumcised, who had friends who were also uncircumcised, who all knew it, and who all didn't give a fuck. It was very refreshing. I was able to get nude in front of them without intense awkwardness—just mild awkwardness :)—and most importantly the very real fact that circumcision is just thing that some penises have and some don't at last felt real to me.

Finally now, I can honestly say that I love my uncut penis. It's true that having a foreskin has made me the target of occasional ridicule and has made me feel anxious and hide from others, but it's also true that having a foreskin that I've had to care for from a young age has enhanced my understanding of my own anatomy and of what I find pleasurable. My penis is unique, but I know that doesn't make it any better or worse. What's important is that it's my penis and my body, and I love it for what it is.



BY BEN KLEYN

SELF-ESTEEM OVERRIDE IN PROGRESS

BY S. BOCCACCIO

. TRIGGER WARNING .

It's insane: how that belittling voice inside of me still manages to slip something in, now and then.

Because of my therapy with Mary Ann (my trauma specialist), I now notice when I'm killing myself with negative or irrational thinking. I notice when I blame things on myself. I notice when my most practiced, comfortable, yet unhealthy habits start spreading from embers; I catch them before they consume me.

For example:

I really want to go to a clothing swap on Sunday. I'd love to see my friends that RSVP'd. It's been months since I've seen any of them, and even though I don't really keep correspondence other than Facebook, I miss seeing them at least once a week as I did in the past. However, I see that there are many people I'm not acquainted with that have RSVP'd as well. I feel like with all the mental and emotional work I'm doing right now, and because I'm so low on my Ativan, meeting a bunch of new people at once will be too overwhelming and I'll end up having a massive anxiety attack: fainting, vomiting, or dying or something. So I thought, "Okay, we'll see how I feel on Sunday." Still, I was mostly resigned to not going. Then this happened: "If you lost some weight before Sunday, then you could go."

Normally, I would not notice the difference between my regular thought-speech and my conniving one, but as soon as the thought was complete, alarms started going off. I noticed that there was something "not right" about what I had just thought, so I dissected it and tore it apart until I realized that it was the tiny voice which almost drove me to death seven years ago. That told me I was fat and worthless when I was twenty-five pounds underweight and three years deep in a physically and emotionally abusive relationship.

I had really believed this. Most of my life, actually. I could not (and still can't) understand how anyone could find me attractive or worthy of attention. But I now see that this way of thinking was formed when I was still just a child, and I truly believed these things because I had been thinking them all my life—taking my abandonment and abuse from the ones that I loved and depended on as validation of that.

The difference between this moment and the past is that, though I'm still producing negative thoughts and speech, I am doing it with less frequency and I am noticing when I do it. Immediately after I make a degrading comment about myself or think shamefully of myself, something inside of me says, "Wait..." My goal is to one day be able to realize these things before they escape my lips or grow into calamitous entrapment in my head.

What's exciting about the progress I'm making, how I'm noticing my unconscious attempt at ruining myself even if it is after it already slips out, is that it signifies the very beginning of me separating who I really am from who I thought I was. For fifteen years, I accepted that I was as screwed up as I was because I was bipolar, and that's it. That I had to take things as they came, and accept who I was, and just trudge through life while being heavily medicated, just keep on keepin' on until I died twenty years before the average person, or that same night.

Now we are finding that almost all of my negative thinking, dangerous habits, and anxieties that hold me prisoner stem from the neglect and abandonment of my mother and biological father and the two to three consecutive years of my grandfather sexually molesting me.

That means that by working through these issues with Mary Ann and learning new ways to cope with stress or things that are triggering to me, along with eradicating all negative thought and speech habits or patterns, I can replace them with positivity and self-love. I can be who I was meant to be before I was rudely interrupted by sick and selfish people.

I'm finally realizing that I'm not twenty-seven, married with two kids, and at the end of my rope. I'm twenty-seven, married with two kids, and at the very beginning of my life.

I am beyond excited.



SELF LOVE BY KATHRYN PRIEST

1. Realize that you want to love yourself and that you deserve to be happy. (Tell yourself you never wanted, and no longer wish to put up with, any negativity towards yourself.)
2. Take away all triggering, upsetting and harmful things in your life, especially things that lower your self-esteem. This could be unfollowing triggering blogs, removing friendships, and resisting harmful thoughts and activities.
3. Look in the mirror and realize that it's not going to change. This is who you are, and it should be celebrated. You are you. That's a good thing.
4. Allow yourself to be dumb, silly, or ugly.
5. Realize that it's normal to feel self-doubt, guilt, and unhappiness towards your person, but you don't want to live inside these emotions. Feel them for as long as you need to, but move on.
6. Stop reading things about how to get a bikini body, or how to lose x amount of weight in x days. You get a bikini body by putting a bikini on your wonderful body.
7. Eat whatever you want.
8. STOP COMPARING YOURSELF TO OTHERS.
9. Accept your gender and sexuality.
10. Don't listen to others' opinions. There will always be negative ones towards you. Don't shave to please others, don't weigh a certain amount to please others, wear a lot of makeup if you want to, sleep with as many men or women as you please!



It's okay to be "weird," to be confused.

It's okay to not "have [my] shit together" by someone else's standards.

It's okay to not like something I'm expected to love.

IT'S OKAY TO SAY NO – and to NOT feel guilty for saying it!

It's okay to have a disability.

It's okay if I need to make an outline of what I'm going to say to help me through a phone call.

It's okay if all I want to do today is sit on my ass and play video games.

It's okay to go to the bar by myself to have a solo night, to not concern myself with [how I look to] other guys.

And it's okay to flirt it up in my sexy new jeans that show off my junk.

It's okay to count calories, and it's okay to have seconds.

It's okay to have animal crackers in bed.

It's okay to have dark circles and redness, and it's okay to use concealing makeup, too.

It's okay to skip my exercises.

It's okay to have a nothing day.

It's okay to have multiple nothing days in a row.

It's okay if my maximum capacity for today is only one to-do item (or even none).

It's okay to have a bad day, to feel alone, to not know what the fuck I'm doing with my life.

It's okay that I'm still single, and it's okay to acknowledge that it sometimes hurts.

It's okay to be distracted.

IT'S OKAY TO MAKE MISTAKES!

It's okay to be vulnerable, to have weaknesses as well as strengths.

It's okay to change my mind, to not be what I used to be (for better or worse).

It's okay to AGE.

It's okay to ask for patience from others for my disability, to require special help for special needs.

It's okay to witness so many relatives struggling with myriad health conditions and experience a mortal fear of heredity.

It's okay to not be as good at writing as when I was in college.

It's okay to be selfish, to forego politeness when I need to stand up for myself.

It's okay to have a "lifestyle" that no one in my family approves of.

It's okay that I'm still not sure whether or not I like anal.

It's okay that, at 25, I still don't know what I want to be when I grow up.

It's okay to not be okay.

It's okay if my self-expression comes in silences and question marks.

It's okay if no one else understands.

It's okay to be me, exactly I am.

IT'S OKAY
TO BE ME!
BY BEN KLEYN

.TRIGGER WARNING.

I'M NOT MAKING THIS UP: A LIFE WITHOUT MAKE-UP

BY
AMANDA
CRETZ

Believe me, I don't look that great without makeup. But I still don't wear it.

I'm 27 years old. My first experience with make-up was 15 years ago, in 5th grade. Like most 12-year-olds, I was forming a love-hate relationship with Woodland Mall. My friends and I would get dropped off on Saturday afternoons to walk around and eat large, expensive cookies from Mrs. Field's. Each time, we would pressure each other to buy something: Gap Dream Fragrant Spray-Lotion, or Limited Too Super-Sparkleface Lip Gloss, or a compact of powder foundation from Hudsons. I actually don't remember trying this out, or buying it, as if it was somehow traumatic and I blocked it from my mind. I do remember getting home, running into my room, and hiding the stuff between my mattress and box spring, right next to my diary. I felt embarrassed and ashamed, shallow and completely out of my league. I didn't know what to do with foundation. So I left it under my bed.

In my teenage years, I took all of that pent up love-hate to the stage of Forest Hills Northern High School. On performance nights, we were to arrive an hour early in order to let other high schoolers smear handfuls of oily sludge onto our faces so we would look better under the stage lights. I secretly liked stage makeup. I thought it made me look prettier. After each performance, while everyone complained about how impossible it was to remove, I admired my even skin tones and blushed cheeks. Almost all of my friends wore makeup on a daily basis, but I still did not allow myself to. This was not because I was secure in how I looked, but because

I was deeply insecure, and worried that even if I did try to enhance my looks, I still wouldn't be beautiful. So I didn't try.

(I told people that I didn't wear cosmetics because my allergies were so bad that it would get totally messed up every day. This is both entirely true and entirely untrue.)

This led to a few major moments in my life in which makeup was conspicuously absent: my senior prom and, years later, my wedding.

My last few years at FHN, I went on a "dance strike." I made it clear to all of my friends that I did not believe in the sinful debauchery that took place on the gym floor during "The Thong Song." The truth was, I was a little afraid that I wouldn't have a date, and dancing made me feel self-conscious, so I thought I would avoid that embarrassment by telling all of my potential admirers that I wasn't going so don't even think about it. A few weeks before the senior prom, I was nominated for the prom court, so my attendance at the dance was obligatory. I did have a date (a very sweet and gracious date, as I was a bit of an abrasive teenager), but I tried to underplay the event as much as possible. I gave every impression that looking pretty was not important to me: I borrowed a dress from a neighbor, did my own hair, and wore no makeup. I did not feel pretty. I did not feel like I deserved to be my high school's prom queen. But at the end of the night, I was.

Being crowned prom queen is one of those things that people are not supposed to hang on to years

later, after real life starts and we all grow up and nothing that happened in high school matters. But that night was important to me. It was then that I actually started believing that I might be okay. I'm not sure if many people saw through all of my feigned confidence and admired me in spite of it, but people did admire me. If anyone cared that I didn't wear makeup, they didn't care that much. I started believing what I had been pretending to believe: that the way I looked wasn't very important in the big scheme of things, and that when people looked at my face, it was only an identifier that reminded them of all of the other things that I was: funny and kind and maybe even talented.

Four years later, I was married, and I walked down the aisle at Oakdale Park CRC as a makeup-less bride. This was my decision, but also my husband's request. He told me that if I made-up my face, it wouldn't be mine. I agreed. We didn't make a big deal about it. On my wedding day, makeup was not an issue.

I have chosen to think about my face as a tool that I can use to communicate, and that others can use to identify me. I don't think about makeup very much anymore.

I don't have anything against makeup at all, or anyone who wears it. I think people use it in wonderful ways. But I've chosen not to use it, and I want other women to know that this is a valid option. If makeup causes you stress, you don't have to use it, and you don't have to feel weird about it and tell everyone it's because of your allergies. If it's something that makes you feel more confident, go for it. It's a great form of self-expression, and it can be stunningly artistic. But you don't owe it to anyone, and it is not the source of your beauty.

I don't make an argument for or against makeup, I make an argument in favor of the freedom to choose whether or not you wear it. As for me, if I made-up my face, it wouldn't be mine.



Prose on Peessies

By C. Smits

I found an old *Playboy* from 1976 in my ex-boyfriend's parent's house when we were visiting one Saturday during the summer of last year. It was aging, heated. The sticky pages lost between the old radiator and the crusty yellow wallpaper.

I was so fascinated by the power that emanated from those full, fluffy pubic hairs that I decided to grow mine out so my pussy had power too.

Only, I've never had a boyfriend who loved me enough to introduce me to his parents, and I've never actually seen a *Playboy* from 1976. I've just always thought that growing out my pubes was the closest thing to controlling what happens with my privates.



HOW TO GET A "BIKINI BODY"

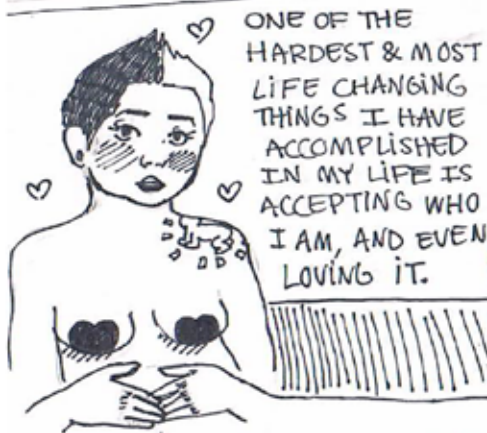
PUT A BIKINI ON UR BODY

BY LYDIA VANHOVEN



MY PERSONAL TIPS FOR LOVIN' YO FINE SELF

BY CAMERON
TYME
EDISON



ONE OF THE HARDEST & MOST LIFE CHANGING THINGS I HAVE ACCOMPLISHED IN MY LIFE IS ACCEPTING WHO I AM, AND EVEN LOVING IT.

① THE BEST WAY FOR ME TO BEGIN TO LOVE WHAT I HATE WAS TO FORCE MYSELF TO ACKNOWLEDGE IT...



EX) I DIDN'T LIKE MY VERY OWN FACE/FACE SHAPE, SO I HID IT W/ HAIR, BUT I CUT IT ALL OFF SO I COULD LEARN TO ACCEPT THE WAY MY FACE LOOKS & EVENTUALLY START TO FIND SOME POSITIVES IN IT. (THOUGH SOMETIMES THIS TAKES A WHILE...)

② I HAD TO REASSURE MY SELF I WAS NOT ALONE



LESBIAN, FAT, Hairy, BABY-FED, ART LOVIN, FANBOYANT, CONFUSED, STUPID, PARANOID, LOUD, SCARED, UGLY, NASTY, FAGGOT, DINGUS, STEP-LILCOUS,



BIG NIPPIES, STRETCH MARKS, FACE, SEXUALLY FRUSTRATED, RUBBY PLAYING, QUEERNO, UNFOCUSED, WEIRD ASS, P.D, VEGETARIAN, CUDDLY, FORMER BULEMIC, CAME, TRASHY, ACNE COVERED, WORRY WART, CRY BABY, SISTER-HATING, BABE INDIVIDUAL.



SOMEONE OUT THERE KNOWS HOW I FEEL ABOUT WHAT EVER ISSUE IT IS I'M DEALING WITH. I'M NOT THE ONLY CURVY ASS QUEER, OR THE ONLY PERSON WITH A COMPLEXION THAT IS LESS THAN PERFECT.

③ FIND SUPPORTIVE, OPEN MINDED FRIENDS TO HELP YOU ON UR JOURNEY

I WOULD BE NO WHERE WITHOUT THE LOVE & SUPPORT I'VE RECEIVED FROM MY FRIENDS HELPING ME REMEMBER THAT I SHOULD NOT BE ASHAMED OF WHO I AM NO MATTER WHAT!



THE POWER OF NO

• TRIGGER WARNING •

Recently, my friend told me, "For an anarchist, you have a lot of rules." And I do. I am contrary. I do refuse things and to engage in certain behaviors to a remarkable degree, especially when compared to others in my friends group. I have boundaries, limits, standards, policies, beliefs, ideals, rules of engagements, preferences. I reserve the right to change any of them or all of them at any moment's notice according to my discretion. I do not apologize for this, and I get necessary power and a sense of self from the control I practice in my daily life and the structure I can give myself with it. Frankly, I say no, and I say it A LOT. I do not owe anyone anything, least of which an explanation for my no's. They are mine to give and give as freely as I wish. I take care of and love myself with my no's, and I am happy with them.

However, little is talked about or even understood about the power of "No". It is a wall I've come up against many times in the radical and social justice community.

Now, the ability to consent and to say yes is an integral aspect of radical politics and community organizing, and rightfully so. In a world where the freedoms and identities of marginalized people are restricted, our choices limited and controlled by majority society and its exclusionary, restrictive mandates, our voices and identities stifled and silenced, bodies shoved away in the darkness and erased, "yes" is liberation, and we say it often and loudly. "Yes" to sex, to reproductive health rights, to civil rights, to queer marriage and love, to body hair and modifications, to revealing outfits, to genderfucking body expressions, to another cupcake, and another, and another, and another! We often define ourselves by this practice of "yes," by doing what we're told we

shouldn't, by going against the values and mores of majority culture and pursuing our desires and wants to the fullest. But what about the "no"? We associate that with the way we've been restricted and held back by majority culture, so it isn't thought of as a good thing, let alone liberating. So why—no, HOW is "No" a practice of self-love?



It is common knowledge that around the age of 2, children start to petulantly and obstinately exercise their right to say no. It is so as to assert their independence and freedom of choice. However, when I was young, I learned very quickly that "no" was not for me. "No" was my father's favorite answer, to a sick degree. I, however, as the good Dominican daughter, was not allowed a "no." "Sí, Mami y Papi" was the most favored term that could come out of my mouth. I had to go to events and places I didn't want to go to, eat things I didn't want to eat, say things I didn't want to say, show face to people I didn't want to show face to. A level of that is very healthy and necessary; children are children and need direction and guidance, and taking your lumps is integral for growth and to understand the responsibilities and realities of the world. However, a lot of it was just unnecessary and more nefarious and undermined me and blurred lines for me as a young girl. A rift was soon created between what I truly felt

BY BRIANA L. URENA-RAVELO

I wanted to do and how I wanted to conduct myself, how I wanted to be treated and touched, and how I was supposed to let other people treat me and touch me, how I was supposed to act and conduct myself. They were two radically different things, and not in a good way.

This kind of upbringing is not without context. As women in a misogynist society, we're taught to be compliant, submissive, never contrary or unwilling, and most certainly never defiant, stubborn, obstinate, or opposed, especially to the wills of a man and patriarchal society at large. A "bitch" is often a woman who does not say yes but instead puts her foot down and says no and does instead what she pleases or tells others what they need to do based on her standards. Like the adage goes, while a slut is a woman who practices her right to say yes, the "friendzone" is when a woman practices her right to say no. We are demonized for essentially not being empty, mindless dolls, mere vessels to fill and meet the desires and expectations of other people at any given moment in time. We upset social order completely when we dare to have our own lives we plan on leading, our own minds and thoughts we plan on feeding, our own steez to be on. "Yes" is submission, is willingness, is giving in, and therefore viewed as passive and feminine. "No" is defiance, it is refusal, it is denial, it is restriction and is seen as too masculine and assertive for women.

So it goes, this kind of socializing is not without incident. Women are undermined and thus made too afraid to stand up for themselves or create standards to protect themselves lest they be seen as difficult, prudish, snobbish, or "bitchy." We often don't know when abuse or harassment happens because we're so removed from our right to protest and to have limits that when the line is crossed we have no clue there even is a line.

As an Afro-Latina woman of color, the "Good Nigger vs. The Bad Nigger" is based on this dynamic. We are meant to be shuckin' n' jiving, saying, "Yes, massa," and bowing our heads down to the wills of supremacist culture upon our bodies. In the article on the "Jezebel" stereotype of Afro-diasporic peoples as found on Ferris University's Jim Crow museum website, it states, "From the end of the Civil War to the mid-1960s, no Southern white male was convicted of raping or attempting to rape a black woman." That is to say, a Black woman doesn't even have the word "no" in her language. We are supposed to say yes to the genocide of our children, to medical experiments on our bodies, to lack of access to proper health care and education, to racist jokes and language and supremacist ideology and mores. The moment we're too much, when we're too headstrong, the moment we speak out against our victimization and mistreatment, we have to be tempered and broken and destroyed, subjugated to white society's will, ire, and punishment. Our rage is not respected nor seen as righteous; it is dangerous. But we know our rage, our refusal, our "no" is our liberator.

This extends to the realms of consenting sex. When my ex found out my sexual history, or lack thereof, she scoffed at me and mocked, "For a sex-positive feminist, that's a pretty low number." No, for a sex-positive feminist, my number is exactly the way it should be. I chose who I did not want to sleep and who I did, I exercised my right to say both yes and no depending on when I saw fit, and that's all I ever needed to do. Sex-positivity is not "The more check marks on your bedpost, the more liberated you are," nor is it "THE KINKIER THE BETTER!" It is "I choose what I wish to do with my body and with whom, if at all, respect other people's right to do the exact same, practice good healthy consent, and further my knowledge and those of others about reproduc-

tive and sexual health as much as possible within my own capabilities and boundaries." No is an extremely important part of sex-positivity and a healthy sexual identity and life. Rape and rape culture is largely all based on this lack of respect for a woman and her "no," for not wanting to dare hear her "no," not wanting to let her say her "no," for those who would force themselves on a woman despite her "no, no, no, no."

"No" as exerted by majority culture is restricting, paternalistic, dangerous, and limiting. It infringes on the lives and power and identities of many people. "No" as exerted by marginalized communities—or us as individuals over ourselves and our lives—is the most amazing and revolutionary thing. I remember the moments I felt so lost, used, vulnerable, and angry when I said yes when I should've said no. I know I am not to blame if others take advantage of me or misuse me. However, I know I don't want to give anyone the chance to do it anyways.

So try saying no and defining yourself with more limits and standards catered by you, for you.

Say no to over-exerting yourself, to toxic academic and work environments.

Say no to going out another day this week when you should be home resting.

Say no to drinking more when you promised yourself you'd slow it down.

Say no to being a doormat to friends, to being compliant to their every whim and their schedules (something I struggle with to this day) and create your own that needs to be respected.

Say no to your own self-destructive behavior, to your self-doubt, to the ways you might cut yourself down.

Say no to physically or mentally uncomfortable situations or environments.

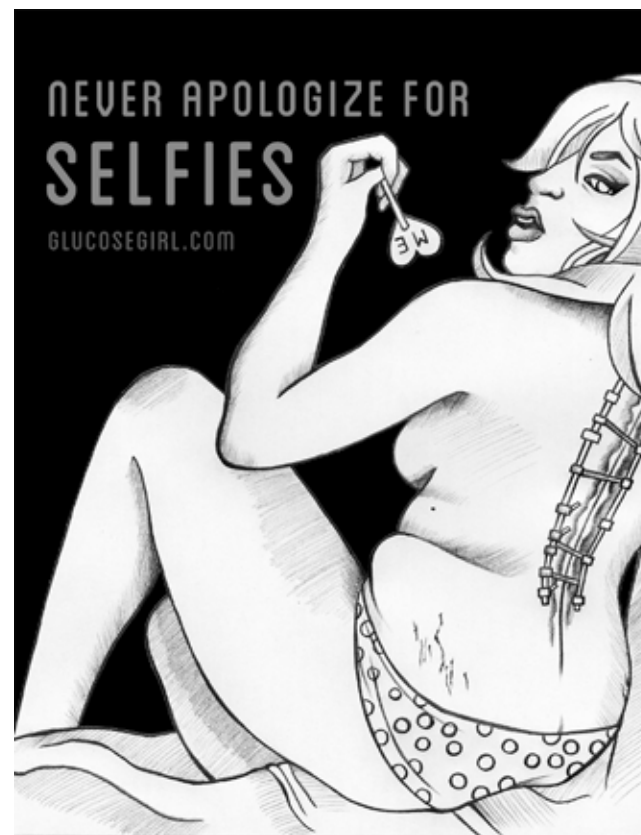
Say no to restaurants or events that don't cater to your physical or dietary needs.

Say no to bad friends and partners who mistreat you or don't care about your health and being, to negative influences, to abusive behaviors, to being treated as a second option.

Say no to rape jokes, to misgendering and getting pronouns mixed up, to being The Token Colored Friend, to being sexually harassed on the streets or groped in the club.

Say no to being shamed for what you need to do to take care of yourself. & don't explain an inch of it if you don't need to. A refusal to be mistreated or disrespected for your life, identity, health, and choices is when you truly stop being victimized by the shit around you and when you can start to live life on your terms and be free.

PS: I know this is easier said than done. Saying no, by virtue of what it all entails, is definitely not simple. A lot of times, saying no is a huge privilege. It takes a lot of strength, energy, power, and pure freedom to even assert yourself, and you often do so often at a huge risk of your personal, mental, financial, physical, and spiritual health. You are not wrong or weak or to blame if you cannot yet state and say your no's and create and define your boundaries. You are not "playing the victim" or "deserving" of what happens badly to you or what goes wrong to you if you cannot refuse or show refusal, if you can't yet state how you do not like certain behavior. Survival is valid and you don't have to apologize for or explain that. I hope you get to the place to have your own no's, at your pace and time and in a manner that is safest and healthiest for you. <3



Selfies
by Miranda Sharp

TAKING CONSENT BACK

BY
SHAWN
FERGUSON

.TRIGGER WARNING.

The following writing will be based on the concept of consent, especially as it relates to being physically touched without permission. While discussions surrounding consent are often limited to the interpersonal (including sexual), the notion is inextricably linked to institutions, governance, and, of course, power. Here I will attempt to draw these connections, which will hopefully contribute to our understanding of physical autonomy as a whole and bring us closer to liberation as a community.

Premise

As a fundamental moral principle, one must obtain consent before interacting with someone else physically. To act without consent is a violation of that individual's right to control what happens to their body. This violation is of the worst kind. To break down the physical barrier between yourself and another being without permission is seen as deplorable the world over. Much of medicine has focused on eliminating foreign bodies from our own that don't have our consent to be there. Law and ethics continually return to the core concept of protecting individuals' right to maintain physical self control. Many say the most immoral behavior is that associated with pedophilia; which is to say the only thing worse than violating the physical boundary of another person without permission is... if that person is a child. Without thinking we know these behaviors are wrong.

Consent and permission go hand in hand; when used as a verb, the two are nearly synonymous. Permission is at the core of physical autonomy, which means someone (or something) else has to ask first, before they touch you (the nature of this touch, pleasant or painful, does not negate the need for consent prior to the touch happening). This is a rule.

Theft

Everyone has a right to physical autonomy. While we will never have complete control over our bodies, the inherent power of discretion lies with the individual. Meaning what I want to do with my body (or what I want done with my body) supersedes any wants or desires another being may have for my flesh. Your body is the first thing you own, and your right to it is always primary.

It is a common misconception that rights are something actually given to us and secured by others, especially institutions. (This is demonstrated every time someone passively allows the government or a corporation to take physical control over their life. While the powerful will certainly use force when/if necessary, as every victim is certainly not passive, it is much easier to maintain control when the individual believes that the right to their body actually belongs to the institutions in question.) These same institutions have perpetuated the myth that they own our bodies in order to better leverage their power over the us. However, as those in power become increasingly cavalier, routinely violating the rights of people the world over, one can easily be tricked into believing that people have lost their rights, that they've been taken away. This couldn't be further from the truth.

The most tortured prison inmates retain all of their rights. They've not lost them. They've been violated, perhaps in the worst way. However, the individual remains an individual, despite the violations. One cannot be stripped of their rights; they are fundamentally inseparable; that's why they're rights. (Recently Guantanamo prisoners have reasserted the power inherent in their physical autonomy by refusing to eat until the current laws which would see them released are abided by. US government soldiers have forced feeding tubes down their throats).

The onus, the burden herein, lies on the perpetrator. They are the violator, referred to as a "criminal" under law. The fact that we see a return to this basic moral again and again throughout history and religious texts is another indication of its ubiquity in human culture. The theft of consent is routinely seen as deplorable and unacceptable behavior. However, we all know that not all violators are treated equally. Hierarchical structures have distorted our moral sense in this matter, compelling many to believe that the desires of those on top supersede the rights (and lives) of those below. The most vile dictators have made a regular practice of physically (and sexually) violating those they perceive to be lower than them. Violating another's consent is persistently used as a tool of power, creating some of the most horrific atrocities the world has seen. Where there are power-hungry hierarchies, we see the many gruesome variations on this same theme. Rape is often used systematically to subdue and dehumanize entire communities. Genocide, police brutality, the prison industrial complex, and the slave trade are all violations of the same core right: physical autonomy. These are examples of theft; times when our bodies have been stolen from us and used for something we did not give permission for. Labor. Sex. Exploitation. *We did not consent.*

We have all been violated terribly.

Radical Self Love

The issues surrounding consent saturate our very existence. Society at large has continually failed to apply it fully and respectfully to its major institutions, including those surrounding government, food, healthcare, housing, and the environment. This is not a coincidence. This distorted morality, perpetuated by our entire civilization, is inherent in its very structure. Now we face one of the most important moral issues for life on this planet. We must protect the right of physical autonomy for all individuals, regardless of their status. We have a right to choose.

This issue requires our full attention. The implications are tremendous. This is why it is so important for us to love ourselves.

We've all been violated on different degrees, and while we are not responsible for our pain, we are responsible for our recovery. We have a responsibility to heal each other. We need to heal each other because we're all we've got. The violators owe us our dreams back, however their word is no good. Again and again we are promised healthcare, nutritious food, good sex, love, and freedom. One need only take a look around and see how well the People in Charge are doing at taking care of us. We are not getting what we need. *Fuck them.*

And if we really want to fuck them good, we need to take care of one another. We need to heal ourselves. We need to rediscover community and reinstate the value of consent in our everyday lives, which means reinstating it in our communities and in our culture.

This is what makes self-love "radical". Once we collectively realize that we are worth saving, that our lives are worth living, we will no longer be governable. It is at this point when we will be truly empowered to break through the prisons that have been built around us. (Note that this "empowerment" is not in a wishy washy non-profit kinda way, but in a truly powerful, smash-the-motherfucking-patriarchy kinda way.)

Empower yourself, your family, your neighbors, your entire community. Pay it forward. Do favors with no strings attached. If you love something, give it away. Support the people in your life who are trying to create a better world: a world without coercion, control, and the constant violation of consent. The good news is that since capitalism is doing such a bad job providing for us, there's plenty of people doing excellent work on their own. The world (even Grand Rapids) is full of "strangers" just waiting to love each other.

Folks can change their own culture by having conversations about consent and what it means in their community, how important it is, and establish what violations actually look like. Everyone needs to understand that to violate another's consent is completely unacceptable. And this doesn't just mean policing people's behaviors. We need a refined, consensual decision-making process to come to an agreement about what we will and won't accept, and then how we're going to handle the difficult situations (because they will arise). As radical as that all might sound, people are already doing this work all around the world, from Caracas to Grand Rapids. This is not a new idea.

I've recently come across the following "radical" definition of consent as it applies to sexual relationships in Harm Reduction as Pleasure Activism by Benjamin Shepard. Hopefully this will contribute to people's conversations on the topic (emphasis below mine):

The presence of 'yes' and not just the absence of 'no,' with the understanding that everyone can change their mind, stop, or back up at any time.

Consent must be established each and every time sexual activity happens.

Note that each individual holds equal decision making power. Of course, this process doesn't work in a vacuum. The community as a whole must not only agree on the terms of consent, but also how to deal with violations.

Love the Violators

Violators should be handled with love. I'm going to let that one sink in for a minute...

I know this feels like a stretch, if not a punch in the face... If you're still reading, let me explain:

We're constantly told the only acceptable con-

sequence for "breaking the rules" (read: "social norms") is punishment. Those who violate must be punished, typically through revocation of their rights, usually through imprisonment or inflicting pain by breaching their physical autonomy. I reject these reactions. Retribution lies at their core, and they're completely ineffective. "Criminals" recidivate; they don't stop, they don't learn. If we want to put an end to this culture of violence, rape, and theft, then we're going to have to take a radically different approach to how we handle violence, rape, and theft. That's where love comes in.

Love doesn't imply passivity, and it doesn't mean you accept someone else's bullshit. Love doesn't mean you give someone else whatever they want, or that they deserve it. But it does mean we treat everyone like a person. Everyone.

Love looks different in different communities and in different circumstances. Loving yourself and your body is primary, therefore in the event an individual insists on trying to steal that from you, by all means, drop that motherfucker. (Seriously. Don't feel bad, either.) However, all violations of consent are not of the same degree, and therefore reactions to violations need to be circumstantial and flexible. In many cases, those who violate another's consent are expressing love the way they've been taught, albeit harmful, toxic, and/or inappropriate. If we're going to create a community where these violations don't exist (or are at least far less frequent), we need to teach the violators.

A personal example: I was once with someone who meant a lot to me, and we made ourselves vulnerable with each other. Soon my hands were exploring new places... and suddenly I was told to stop. I was "moving too fast". They made it clear my actions were not welcome, and afterward we discussed what had happened. We both felt more comfortable around the other person after we both got back on the same page (up to this point, much

of our communication regarding sexual boundaries had been nonverbal). We both grew from the "incident", and I learned what that person was comfortable with (and how to treat them more respectfully), and was able to be critical of myself in a safe environment. I realized that everyone makes mistakes, and in the heat of the moment everyone is not going to be on exactly the same page all the time. So long as no means no, and stop means fucking stop, then that's OK. No one gets hurt. Instead, we grew together out of what had the potential to be an ugly situation.

We can't assume a role of power over violators just because they "broke the rules". Remember, violators have rights, too. What violators don't get is power. We revoke that from them when we refuse to let them dictate the terms of our lives. Confronting violations appropriately neuters those who would use such tactics to gain power and ensures we don't passively accept conditions in which we are being abused or exploited. We actively confront violations using love. If someone is fundamentally incapable of respecting those boundaries, then drastic measures must be taken, no doubt. (Maybe then their friends won't make the same mistake.)



Do It

Communities from New York to Egypt to Detroit have already demonstrated what the process radical self-love looks like, sometimes on a mass scale. They've flooded the streets, blocking traffic for miles. They've reclaimed the commons (because it was always theirs, anyway) sometimes by simply sitting down and refusing to move. They've blocked pipelines and sabotaged new construction. They've voted leaders out, and if that didn't work, they've overthrown them by force. They've fed the hungry on the excess of capitalism. They've created their own free healthcare and daycare systems. They've kicked the police, military, and corporations out of their communities. They've said, "We love ourselves too much to let you continue to steal what's most important in our lives." They've said, "No more!"

These people across the world are revoking their consent and taking their bodies back. They have "woken up" and they're no longer going to remain passive (though many never fell asleep and have been fighting all along). Many of them are poor (because most of the people in the world are poor), and none of them are free from the abuse inflicted upon everyone who lives under the dystopic nightmare modern civilization has become. The alternatives we've seen arise are previews of what our radical self-love might look like once fully realized. It never looks exactly the same in two different places, but it always emerges. Love finds a way.

Maybe the best thing about radical self-love is that you can start doing it right away. It relies on no one else. It can't be bought and sold in the market. It's completely on our own terms. The only thing we have to lose is our chains. Love yourself and love one another without compromise. Right now. 100% of the time.

HOW TO STAY SANE

BY DOROTHY PECK

Step 1: Take your clothes off

Don't ask
Trust that each of these steps will work better in the nude
Stand in front of a mirror and peel off your outer shell
It's okay if you hesitate
If standing in your underwear feels like being on the edge of a diving board
And below you is a bottomless pit of self-loathing
Jump anyway
Let your natural body wash over you
Let the waves of nudity drown you
Let your newly uncovered muscles pull you back up
Remember that this is your body
And it is only a stream leading to the magnificent ocean which is your soul

Step 2: Touch your stream

Run your fingers over the scars you earned
The cellulite you were blessed with
And your crooked nipples
Don't pinch or squeeze anything
Let your naked magic embrace you
Let your own caress be the one that soothes your tired mind
Rediscover the parts of that you that you once deemed unworthy of love
Realize that all of you is worthy of love

Step 3: Dance

Because your life is a fabulous party
And you're the only one who deserves a spot on the VIP list
Turn up something fast
Shake everything you've got
It's okay if your rhythm and pitch are off
This dance isn't meant to be pretty
It's meant to set you free
Let it awaken your soul
Let it lift you up and carry you to the stars
Let it lay you back down on a blanket of warmth and melody

Step 4: Get it all out

Open a window and scream
Scream until your neighbors are shouting back at you
Battle them with your voice and come out a victor
Scream until you can't anymore
Then whimper
Whimper until you cry
Until your defiant walls of strength come tumbling down
Get out the crazy they've caged in
Make room for sanity
Make room for happiness
Make room for love

Step 5: Leave

Clean yourself up
Put on your very best outfit
Do that sexy thing with your hair
Lift your head up high
Walk out of your front door
Go get lost in your own city
Whether by foot or bike
Avoid bars
Opt for the park instead
Give \$5 to someone who needs it
Consider giving them your keys and wallet
A chance to donate your life and find a new one
Decide against it
Consider giving up
A chance to quit this earth and hope for a new one
Decide against it
Remember how much you love your own bed
Remember the beautiful people who have laughed in your company
Imagine how many more will
Go back home
Put every ounce of your newly mended heart into tomorrow



WITHOUT A MIRROR

• BY VERONICA DOUGLAS •

I see myself more clearly without a mirror
In my head, in the cool autumn air and the dry leaves crackling by, I am without two dimensions
But the rest suffices to make me feel
like a legitimate human being.

For once, I am whole:
there is not anything more you want from me,
a person less annoying, more attractive, less aggressive and awkward;
you don't ask of me anything more than my effort, which unfurls and flails and blossoms like a flower.

You've raced me to the door
Calling me feral bitch gay retard stupid ugly hermaphrodite
And I was hurt
But now I'm happy
to have been honoured with the insults based on the brave, beautiful and individual people
whom we have so long stuck with short, sharp insults
but whom deserve the world
that we can no longer withhold, because of
the way I want to love you and care for you for all time!

They are not insults.
They are wings.

What you are is a musical scale.
What you are is a songbird!

And in feeling myself, for once,
not broken by my petty nuisances and shortcomings, my unjustified despair
Like I am part of every neuron in every atom of the surrounding world
The atoms begin to buzz happily.



DO NOT FEAR WHAT'S INSIDE OF YOU
→ BY RYAN KOSTER

SELF LOVE FOR A SERIAL MONOGAMIST

BY JOI DUPLER



I am a serial monogamist. Worse even, I am the master of rebounders. I could probably write a step-by-step guide on how to perpetually get into serious, long-term relationships.

I don't think I've been single (err, between partners) for longer than a few weeks (maybe a month) in my entire adulthood, and I'm fairly sure I'm nearing the double-digits for the number of people I've said those 'three little words' to.

It's not that I'm trivializing how much each of these people meant to me or the relationship we shared, nor does this mean that I wasn't sincere about my feelings towards each of them. I did mean those words at the time and I did (and still do) care about nearly each person I've dated. I used to justify this behavior to myself saying, "Well, obviously you're over so-and-so if you have feelings for someone else." Or I wouldn't even try to justify it because I act upon impulse and what feels best to me at the time. After so many relationships following the same pattern and failing, I had to confront the harsh truth to myself about the motives fueling my decision to rebound time and time again. The harsh truth is: I don't like me enough to be alone and I only feel good about me when someone I'm dating idealizes me and thinks I'm the most amazing, handsome, and smartest person ever. In other words, I'm in love with how people see me, how I want people to see me. Once reality sets in though, you know, where my flaws can no longer be hidden or ignored and I've been banished from the pedestal, that's when I begin

to push away and isolate myself from them until we break up and I can continue the cycle of:

1. Infatuation.
2. Facebook Official.
3. Blissful Honeymoon Period.
4. Break-up (listen to Tegan & Sara for 3 days).
5. Find someone new.

In his bestselling classic *The Art of Loving*, Erich Fromm argues that self-love is crucial if not necessary component to ANY loving relationship. He states that unhealthy behaviors in relationships (i.e. jealousy, possessiveness, selfishness, or dishonesty) all stem from one's inability to love themselves and confront or accept our human condition of loneliness. While this void manifests itself differently in relationships, such as one person accepting unhealthy or unloving behavior from a partner versus another committing the unloving acts, they both can be attributed to a lack of self-love. Although he defines what love is (and isn't) in several different ways throughout the book, I simply want to focus on how this relates to my affliction of serial monogamy.

Although I don't identify as a cis-female, I was socialized as female and thus suffered through endless blows of cultural messages telling me I wasn't enough on my own and that my value as a human being depended on who I dated. If I was single, well, there surely was something wrong with me? Right? I couldn't be enough on my own, I had to prove my worth, correct? This sexist (not to mention heterosexist AND cissex-

ist) bullshit coupled with a troubled past essentially set the stage for me to become a serial monogamist who unintentionally uses people to feel alright with themselves. And what makes it worse is that I've been preaching about radical self-love for years, but not to the person who needed it the most: me.

While I haven't got it all figured out, I've been trying some new things out for a change and here's what I've learned so far:

1. Sometimes the best sex is with yourself. Get down with yourself.
2. Sometimes the bed feels the most comfortable when you can spread yourself out diagonally and fart loudly, and there's no one there to be grossed out or telling you to move over.
3. Take yourself on dates with yourself. Who gives a fuck if people react weirdly or stare at you like you're a strange creature from X-Files? Go to any fucking movie you want, drink wine at your favorite bar, and try that new restaurant downtown. Find a new recipe and cook yourself a fancy dinner, go out dancing in that bow tie, or just hang out with a book or your drawing pad at a coffee shop. While doing all these things, try to detach yourself from your phone and/or interwebs.
4. Do what feels good to you. What things do you like to do? What things help you get out of bed? What are some things you'd like to try? For me, I feel good when I cook dinner for my friends, complete a project, avoid my phone for an hour, make important phone calls to Sallie Mae or simply doing something I've been procrastinating with. If you're not sure like I was, try different things and discover it slowly. It'll unfold itself.

5. Decrease or minimize the harm of self-hating thoughts and/or self-destructive behavior. For me, this means to stop holding myself back from doing things I love to do, out of fear that I will be perceived as inferior or incompetent by others. Self-destructive behavior means different things to different people, and as a survivor of trauma, I understand that we all have different ways of surviving struggle. It is not my place to judge. With that being said, I'll define it like this in relation to myself: the shit I do that I later feel bad about but continue to do anyway because it's an escape and a survival mechanism. I feel bad when I stand my friends up, so I'm going to try to be more reliable. I feel bad when I call into work, so I'm attempting to force myself out of bed to get ready for work (even on the bad days when it seems too overwhelming). I don't like it when I get out of control with booze and say hurtful things I've been bottling up to the ones I love, so I'm trying to drink less and be more honest and upfront about my feelings...

6. Don't beat yourself up when you fuck up. We're bound to make mistakes, repeat old patterns, and disappoint ourselves occasionally or a lot. When you fuck up, try to simply process what happened and why it happened and move on. Forgive yourself and remember that radical self-love is a daily fucking process and it's hard and simply being alive can be a feat for some.

Lastly and most importantly,
7. Don't get an OkCupid account.

No, but really, I'll end with this quote from Erich Fromm: "In love the paradox occurs that two beings become one and yet remain two." Because really, you're good enough. It's just about realizing it. Once you do realize it, someone else who believes it about themselves will see you... for you... and realize how great you are, too.

SELF LOVE THROUGH HOT YOGA —AND— HARD WORK BY LYDIA VANHOVEN

I've never been the type to exercise. I've never been "fit" or into "fitness" or called "skinny" or anything except plus size, fat, curvaceous, or voluptuous (which, to me, sounds a little to sexy to be calling a 13-year-old girl's body – but that's a different topic). My boobs are big, my ass is big, my stomach is big – and personally, THAT'S THE WAY I LIKE IT. I like that my secret is a size too big for Victoria. I like buying speciality clothes or altering stuff because no one carries my size. I celebrate my curves, marvel at my lovely fat rolls, and look at how amazing my ass is every single morning right when I wake up.

But you can probably guess what I'm going to say: it hasn't always been this way. When I was a kid, I'd PRAY TO JESUS to be skinny. I'd wish on every birthday cake. I went to Weight Watchers, Jenny Craig, and Curves before the age of 16. Nothing worked, except one thing: learning to love myself.

It all started with hot yoga. I was nervous. All the shit I had read on blogs seemed like it was going to be INTENSE. And hard. And that I was going to be the fattest person in the room. And when I got there, it was and I was the fattest one there. But the yogi told us not to push ourselves. It's about breathing, and feeling your body. I had never felt as intimate with my body as I did in that room, not even during sex. I felt like I had discovered a new person. And it wasn't someone fit or healthy or whatever the fuck you want to call it – it was someone that was at peace with their body, and felt connected with their soul through each breath, each movement, each up-dog, down-dog. I finally had power over my body, and it was beautiful.

The other part to my self-love equation is hard work. SERIOUS HARD WORK and being committed to stuff I really love. Sleeping less and working more. And I love myself for it. The harder I work, the better I feel. I love doing things that mean a lot to me. And sometimes you have to sacrifice your time for the things you love. It might mean not drinking on Friday night. Or getting a beer after work. Or watching Netflix all Saturday afternoon.

But the times when I have loved myself the least are when I wasn't doing shit.

Of course, you gotta make sure to take care of yourself. Rest when you need. Stop working and have a day of fun, but it's all in moderation. My self love is being committed to what I love, and doing shit that really makes me feel good in my heart.



Methods of Coping with the Absurdities of Life by J.J. Lepke

- Drink coffee with almond milk and a dash of peppermint extract to remind you of the Christmas build-up (you know, that time period every year between Thanksgiving and the week preceding Christmas, before everyone is burned out on holiday cheer.)
- Quietly observe *Kahn Academy* videos without intending to actually learn anything.
- Search the Blingee tag on Tumblr.
- Watch *Black Books* while drinking cheap wine, all the while pretending you're watching Sherlock in a parallel universe.
- Meditate to droning tamboura music until you begin to experience Special-Agent-Cooper levels of visionary manifestations.
- Eat a grilled cheese sandwich in the bathtub. It's a better idea than it sounds like it is.
- Neutralize negative graffiti you encounter by enveloping it in a speech bubble emanating from a hairy ass.
- Play Twista's "Wetter" so loud that the windows shake. Think of it as a mating call.
- Remind yourself that most of perceived reality is illusory and socially-constructed (in other words, meaningless bullshit.)



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FEMINISM

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